



NEWS RELEASE

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City, state and federal officials monitoring cleanup of oil spill into tidal drainage ditch

City, state and federal authorities continue to monitor the spread and cleanup of 3,000 to 3,500 gallons of used motor oil that leaked Sunday from an old oil tank at the back of a building in the 2100 block of Mingee Drive into a tidal drainage ditch just a few yards away.

The ditch is also several hundred feet behind the West Hampton Community Center at 1638 Briarfield Road.

By Wednesday, the oil was following a series of connecting ditches and had snaked from the spill site northeast to Newmarket Creek and the Gordon Cooper Bridge on Power Plant Parkway.

Officials said the spill does not pose a serious health hazard, although residents who live near the ditches should keep their pets from going into the oil-stained water.

Larry Logan, emergency operations director for LCM Corporation, the Roanoke, Va.-based company that has been hired by the owner of the oil tank to clean up the spill, said one of the most intensive part of that cleanup - isolating the oil and removing contaminated soil from the drainage ditch - will probably take about a week or so. But they may be monitoring and maintaining the site for months to come.

The owner of the tank is a trucking maintenance company that uses used motor oil for heating during the winter, according to Todd F. Cannon, hazardous materials officer with the Virginia Department of Emergency Management.

Hampton fire units first responded to a report of an oil spill about 12:50 Sunday afternoon. When they got to the back of the property on Mingee Drive firefighters saw that oil had leaked from an old tank into the drainage ditch just a few yards away.

Crews investigated further and determined that 3,000 to 3,500 gallons of used motor oil had leaked from a hole in the tank. The hole was about three-fingers wide.

The Hampton Fire Department's Hazmat team was called and went to the scene along with the Virginia Department of Emergency Management and the Department of Environmental Quality.

Hampton units immediately began to attack the spill with booms - temporary barriers that soak up or contain the oil - hoping to eliminate any further environmental damage. The spill was originally contained to an area of approximately a quarter mile in the drainage system. But Monday's heavy rainfall caused the water in the ditches – and the oil that floats on top - to flow over the booms, up the banks of the ditches, and to move further downstream towards Newmarket Creek.

Cannon said the owner of the maintenance company is responsible for the cleanup. But local, state and federal officials, including members of the U.S. Coast Guard who were also at the site this week, are monitoring the cleanup and advising LCM.

In addition to the containment booms, LCM is using vacuum trucks to vacuum up the oil and water. Company workers have already begun work at the spill site and in the ditches, and they plan to remove a layer of dirt in the ditch that has been saturated by the oil.

The major work should be done in about a week or so, but LCM is expected to continue to monitor the site, placing booms in ditches and removing them as needed. “We’ll have a presence here for months,” Logan said.

Part of the cleanup also calls for damming the tidal ditch where the spill started and rerouting the water through temporary, above-ground pipes so cleanup crews can more easily remove the contaminated dirt. “We’re talking about days and days of digging,” Logan said.

Cannon said good weather should help with the cleanup effort because the sun will help degrade the oil. He also said they are monitoring the impact of the spill on marshlands, but “we have to be careful about marsh because we can do more damage traipsing around there.”

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